DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 249 480 CS 007 812

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TITLE Curriculum Evaluation and Change in Reading: Soaring to New Horizons.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the New York State Reading Association (18th, Kiamesha Lake, NY, November 6-11, 1984).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Evaluation; Decision Making; Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; *Needs Assessment; *Planning; *Program Development; Program Effectiveness; *Reading Programs; Reading Skills; Resource Materials; Student Needs; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

In planning any new reading program, teachers should know exactly what they want to accomplish. This requires careful identification of overall goals and objectives. During this first step in planning, all of the teachers who will be affected by the program should submit lists of the reading skills that they believe are pertinent at their grade level. After several rounds of revisions, the teachers are likely to produce a scope and sequence of skills that leave no doubt about the placement of skills at various grade levels and fit the needs of the students. Next, student observation, formal assessments, and interviews with parents,teachers, and students should be used to gather information about students' needs. The third step involves instructional procedures--all of the decisions relating to how to teach once a decision has been made about what to teach. Finally, the program planner needs to make available to teachers a variety of resource materials, extending beyond the basal series to include paperback supplements and teacher-made materials. By taking into consideration all of these components and by helping the teachers feel a sense of ownership in all aspects of the planning, a reading program can be developed to address the cognitive and affective needs of students. (HOD)

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CURRICULUM EVALUATION AND CHANGE IN READING:

SOARING TO NEW HORIZONS

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New York State Reading Association
1984 Conference
November 6-9, 1984
Kiamesha Lake, New York

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After being a teacher educator for several years, last year I was put in the enviable (or is it unenviable?) position of practicing what I had been preaching. I was asked to direct the planning of a new developmental reading program which included students in kindergarten through grade eight. My task was to evolve a reading curriculum which would help children develop, maintain, and apply those skills which compose the necessary building blocks for learning to read, reading to learn, and enjoying both. Past experience in evaluation and curriculum projects had convinced me of two factors. One, educational change cannot be implemented by fiat. Lasting change takes time to implement and must be accepted by those who implement it. And, two, there are at least four major components which need to be taken into consideration in any attempt to plan a new program: goals, needs of the learners, instructional procedures, and resources.

I. OBJECTIVES

In any reading program teachers must know exactly what they want to accomplish. This requires careful identification of overall goals and objectives. The portion of the program's objectives relating directly to reading skills is generally referred to as the scope and sequence of the reading program. While no list of objectives is absolute, writing down a sequence of skills presents an idea of what one wants the students to be able to do to become successful readers—which skills should be taught and in what order should they be introduced, developed, and reinforced.

Curriculum research has reported that it is imperative that teachers who are going to be affected by a curriculum change feel a definite sense of ownership of all aspects and all stages of the curriculum planning and development. Therefore, during this first step in the curriculum planning, all of the teachers who were affected by the change were invited to submit lists of the reading skills which they believed were pertinent at their grade level. These lists were collated and the skills were organized into groups such as word

identification skills, comprehensions skills, study skills, and literary skills. After reviewing research results and the reading curricula of successful programs in existence, I added any skills which appeared to be missing from the teachers' lists. These revisions were then presented to the teachers who divided into sub-groups to revise them. For instance, nursery school and kindergarten teachers reviewed the readiness skills, first grade teachers the next level and so on. I moved from group to group answering questions about terminology and skill level placement. When these small groups were satisfied with the skill lists at their level, we regrouped into larger divisions so that teachers could begin to see how the objectives overlapped and when they were introduced, developed, and reinforced.

In the past, certain skills, most notably study skills, had been neglected. It was easy to say, "Oh, I'm sure that was taught last year," or "I think it's covered next year." When teachers met to review skills over several grade levels it was easier to see which skills they were primarily responsible for. Teachers from the nursery school through second grade formed one group, third grade through fifth grade another group, and sixth and eighth grade the last group. One of the benefits of such meetings over a period of weeks is that teachers from various levels spent time talking with one another about educational issues, something that seldom seems to take place in the "egg-carton" society we call a school building. Another benefit gained from such meetings was that some teachers began to realize that we were not so much interested that their students merely cover the pages of a basal or workbook, but we were more concerned that certain skills be mastered. After several rounds of revisions the teachers produced a scope and sequence of skills that left no doubt about the placement of skills at various grade levels and fit the needs of the students the teachers served.

2. STUDENT NEEDS

This brings us to a second major component of curriculum change--the needs of the school's children. What are their backgrounds, oral language development, interests and attitudes, reading abilities, and general style of learning? The information for this component was gathered in a variety of ways. First, the students were observed in learning situations in their classroom and on the playground (see observation instrument) to gather information on their oral language development, ability, and learning style. Second, teachers and parents were interviewed to ascertain further information about student background and abilities. Finally a sample of the students were formally assessed (see assessment battery listings) and informally interviewed to determine their abilities, interests and attitudes, and oral language development. This multi-level evaluation of the students' needs was valuable for at least three reasons. First, it forced some teachers, who otherwise might not have done it, to take a more in-depth look at their students. Second, parents were offered a chance to vocalize their perception of their children's needs. And finally, the composite portrait which emerged from these various sources enabled the faculty to begin to think about appropriate instructional procedures.

3. INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURES

The third component involves instructional procedures--all the decisions relating to "how-to-teach" once a decision has been made about "what-to-teach." How will the teachers organize for instruction, manage the program, and teach the skills? The first step in determining the procedures to be used involved surveying and observing (see observation instrument) the classrooms a number of times to ascertain the instructional procedures being used and their effectiveness, keeping in mind the school's skill-based, experiential learning philosophy. The results of these observations illustrated that

several patterns appeared to be consistent across grade levels and across teachers to varying degrees. Those patterns, unfortunately, had tended to produce a rather fragmented reading program. I'll mention a few here.

First, reading and reading instruction did not appear to be perceived as valuable by many of the faculty. Some teachers made no effort to illustrate to their students that reading was important. If reading is viewed as the twenty minutes during language arts or English instruction when students read in a basal or paperback, then it is no wonder that many students did not understand what reading really was.

Secondly, many teachers did not appear to be aware of the scope and sequence involved in reading. (These observations took place before the series of scope and sequence meetings mentioned earlier.) There was a hesitancy to work with more than one or two reading levels. Little thought was given to prerequisite skills. Teachers did not ask themselves, "Why am I doing this today?"

Very little teaching was observed occurring in some classrooms. Rather, what was observed might be described as teaching by mentioning. This was then either followed by a worksheet, or even worse, no practice at all.

Children were frequently told to read a story without receiving background information, vocabulary help, or a purpose for reading. When stories were discussed, they were often top heavy with teacher talk. Literal questions were often the only type asked.

These patterns and others which were observed were not likely to produce an effective reading program. Therefore, a number of steps were taken to help teachers begin to look more closely at the strengths and weaknesses of their instructional procedures and to educate them with regards to possible improvements. First, the series of scope and sequence meetings described earlier were instituted to help teachers examine just exactly what they should be teaching. Second, inservice workshops were instituted on various types of instructional procedures such as the directed reading activity (DRA) approach to instruction.

Teachers were taken through a sample basal lesson using the DRA method to illustrate various steps in a good reading lesson. Handouts, explaining the method in outline form, were distributed. Later another inservice session concerned classroom organization in reading groups, and still a third specifically dealt with the teaching of test-taking skills. Other inservice sessions were planned for the next year. A school-wide attempt to heighten the entire faculty's awareness of experiential learning and skills-based learning contributed more thought-provoking activities.

In addition, articles from professional journals concerning pertinent topics, e.g., asking comprehension questions, are now routinely distributed to teachers for their reading and discussion. Finally, teachers are encouraged to attend local and national conferences on relevant topics.

One recommendation that resulted from the observation was that one basal series be adopted for use across all grade levels. Previously, many reading series had been used across the levels and sometimes even at a single level with no thought given to their integration. Effective reading instruction is systematic. One way for teachers, who feel insecure about exactly how to teach a specific skill or aspect of reading, to become more confident with the decision-making process is to make use of the resources available.

4. RESOURCES

Therefore, the fourth component, resources, needs to be considered. Frequently schools select materials and try to make them fit the learner. There is no program in this kind of arrangement, merely a set of materials. Through the year materials were gathered from the major publishers of basal series. I first evaluated those materials in light of the scope and sequence which was being written, the needs of the learners, and the instructional procedures which appeared to be necessary to reach the goals. The large selection was narrowed down to three basal series which the teachers evaluated in detail.

Each teacher closely previewed their grade level teacher guide(s), book(s), and workbook(s), and skimmed those levels that came immediately before and after. The in-depth evaluation was kept as objective as possible by the use of an evaluation form which I devised after collecting forms from several sources (see basal evaluation form). This form directed the teachers to assess each series using several criteria: objectives, content of the material, methodology used to present the content, instructional philosophy, supplementary materials, author and editor authority, evaluation of pupil progress, and external attractiveness. Each of these criteria were subdivided into various other sections. As the teachers previewed each teacher's guide, reader, and workbook, they were asked to check whether or not that piece of material fit the criteria. For instance: the objectives are consistent with our reading program objectives; the selections are appropriate for the interests and maturity levels of our students at this grade level; a thorough sequential word identification program is present including phonic analysis, structural analysis, and contextual analysis, etc.

In addition, representatives from the three basal finalists' publishing houses were given time to explain the strengths of their programs to the teachers. They each brought in samples of their entire reading program, including all supplementary material for re-teaching and assessing. After these informative and somewhat "prejudiced" publisher sessions, teachers finished filling out their basal evaluation forms. As I collated the results, a clear-cut decision was evident. A basal series which the teachers believed matched our needs best was chosen as the backbone of the kindergarten through eighth grade program.

While this series represents the major resource, it is not the only resource. No one basal series is complete enough to teach all children to read. Paperbacks supplement the basal at all levels. Teachers read aloud to their students and a SSR period helps illustrate the important place that reading has in the curriculum. In addition, teachers are attempting

to integrate reading with their other language arts areas of listening, speaking, and writing. Teacher-made materials and published material such as reading games, films, tapes, and computer software are being integrated into the program as their need is identified.

One side effect of this four-component curricular change is that the school day for the first through fifth grade students has been changed from a departmentalized one to one that is largely taught by a core teacher. In these grades, at least, it is now also easier to integrate reading with other subject areas such as math, science, social studies, and health.

5. WILL IT WORK?

Curriculum change does not take place over night. Is our program working? At this point I can only say that it appears to be working. Only time will tell... time and work. Inservice sessions to help teachers with their instructional procedures decisions must continue to be a priority. Classroom observations by competent supervisors who can provide feedback to teachers about their program are also very important.

By taking into consideration objectives, student needs, instructional procedures, and resources, and by helping the teachers feel a sense of ownership towards input in all aspects of the change, we hope to produce a reading program that addresses the cognitive and affective needs of our students. If we are successful, such a program will produce children who can read and do read because they enjoy it. Can we practice what we preach? Wish us luck!

EVALUATING BASAL SERIES: PARK SCHOOL 1984

Please fill out one form for each series. Most items may be answered simply by checking the "yes" or "no" box. Feel free to make comments on any items to explain your checkmark if you are not sure of the answer. Examine the book or books which would be used at your grade level. Then briefly examine the previous and following grade level materials.

Please read the philosophy and scope and sequence sections of the teacher's guide. These provide very useful information. Also note any extra materials that are available in addition to the standard book, workbook, and teacher's edition. We will try to purchase these aids when we purchase the basic materials.

Try not to be unduly influenced by the "exterior" of the materials. Almost all series are very attractive. It is the quality of the content that is most important. Look especially at the manner in which the guides suggest that you present the material. Be sure that there are suggestions for:

direct teaching of skills
practice of skills
application of skills to real reading
assessing
re-teaching (if necessary)
re-assessing (if necessary)

Look for a series which suggests various types of comprehension questions:

literal and reorganizational
inferential
critical thinking
creative thinking

Look for a series which introduces study skills early and continues to provide materials on them.

Try to match the scope and sequence of skills which we have assembled with each series. How closely does each series match our objectives?

Read about the authority of the authors and editors. Do they appear to be truly knowledgeable?

BASAL SERIES EVALUATION FORM

NAME OF SERIES: _____

PUBLISHER: _____ COPYRIGHT DATE: _____

GRADE LEVEL EVALUATED: _____

CRITERIA:	YES	NO
I. Objectives		
A. The objectives of the program are well stated.		
B. The objectives are consistent with Park's Reading Program Objectives.		
II. Materials: content		
A. The content is well organized.		
B. The selections are relevant to Park's students.		
C. The selections are appropriate for the interests and maturity levels of Park students at this grade level.		
D. The readability level for this grade is:		
too difficult		
too easy		
about right		
E. The series' books are in a traditional sequence to facilitate moving from one to another.		
F. 1. Selection: The following literary genre are included:		
short stories		
plays		
poems		
informational articles		
science		
social science		
health/sports		
travel/adventure		
others		
parts of longer novels		
legends and myths		
folk tales & tall tales		
science fiction/mystery		
biography & autobiography		
historical fiction		
other _____		

	YES	NO
F.2 There is an adequate balance of fiction and non-fiction.		
3. There is a satisfactory balance of selections from the classics and from contemporary children's literature.		
4. The selections represent an adequate cross section of contemporary living. (urban, suburban, rural)		
5. Positive cultural images of socio-ethnic groups are adequately presented.		
6. Realistic male/female roles in keeping with the conditions existing at the time and place of the story selection are presented.		
7. The following literary elements are adequately developed in the pupil texts and in the teacher edition plans.		
plot		
setting		
characterization		
mood		
imagery		
sound (alliteration, etc.)		
rhythm and rhyme		
simile and metaphor		
others		
8. The stories are varied within each unit and within each book.		
9. The stories are developed on a strong linguistic base.		
10. The artwork provides an environmental setting and mood that is consistent with the story or article.		
11. The artwork illustrates the action in the story.		
12. The artwork represents various art styles: contemporary, impressionistic, realistic, photographs, cartoons.		
G. The content is appropriately sequenced.		
H. There is no undue repetition from one level to another.		

	YES	NO
III. Materials: Methodology		
A. The instructional methodology corresponds to Park's philosophy of instruction.		
B. The teacher's edition contains the following for each selection.		
objectives		
story synopsis		
suggestions for introduction and motivation		
suggestions for vocabulary presentation		
suggestions for purpose setting		
comprehension questions on various levels		
oral reading suggestions to eliminate "round robin" reading		
review lessons for previously introduced skills		
suggestions for direct teaching, practice, application, and follow up of skill teaching		
enrichment		
reproduction of pupil pages		
information on authors		
information on the region and/or environment that is the setting		
C. A thorough sequential word identification program is present including:		
phonic analysis		
structural analysis		
contextual analysis		
D. A thorough, sequential comprehension program is present including:		
comprehension questions available at various levels		
comprehension questions requiring the pupils to think, not "parrot" words and ideas.		
suggestions available for providing comprehension instruction–not just workbook practice		
E. A thorough sequential study skills program is present including:		
organizational skills		
locational skills		
flexible reading rates		
graphic aids skills		

	YES	NO
F. There is a total language arts strand incorporated into the program, including suggestions for:		
speaking		
listening		
writing		
spelling		
G. The lessons in the teacher's edition are varied for interest.		
H. A novice teacher could work successfully with the plans in the teacher's edition.		
I. The skillbook (workbook) provides practice consistent with the skills taught:		
reviews story vocabulary		
provides activities to help pupils apply skills		
J. The skillbook can be done independently by the pupils.		
directions are stated simply and are easy to follow		
self-help is provided for the student		
K. The format of the teacher's edition is easy to follow.		
L. The pages of the teacher's edition are annotated for extra help.		
IV. Materials: instructional philosophy		
The methodology incorporates the following:		
teacher directed instruction		
written instruction in the pupil text		
supervised practice		
independent practice		
testing		
student knowledge of results		
provisions for re-teaching		
V. Materials: supplementary		
The following supplementary materials are available:		
flashcards		
wall charts or big books		
worksheets for re-teaching slow learners		
pupil progress record charts		
cassettes for listening or other skills		
transition books		
books for individualized reading		
other _____		

	YES	NO
VI. Evaluation of pupil progress		
A. Sufficient evaluation materials are available for periodic assessment.		
B. Evaluation materials are compatible with the series' objectives as well as Park's.		
VII. Authorship and Editorship		
A. The authors and editors are recognized as distinguished reading authorities in reading research and teaching.		
B. The team of authors and editors includes:		
children's literature specialist		
reading supervisor		
classroom teachers at various levels		
child development specialist		
language arts specialist		
linguistics specialist		
testing and evaluation specialist		
VIII. External Attractiveness		
A. The covers are attractive and easy to keep clean.		
B. The level is coded on the back or spine.		
C. The book titles are meaningful.		
IX. Satisfaction		
This series would be my first choice.		
This series would be my second choice.		
This series would be my third choice.		

Additional comments regarding this series: